

Cobb County Has New “*Idol*”

(May 7, 2008) They sang. They danced. They played instruments. “They” are the contestants for the 4th annual *Cobb Senior Idol*. Ten acts recently took to the stage at Jennie Anderson Theatre in Marietta to showcase their talents and compete for the coveted title of *2008 Cobb Senior Idol*.

In 2005, with the growing popularity of *American Idol*, Harold Smith, then-president of the Senior Citizens Council of Cobb County, decided seniors needed a talent competition of their own. After pitching the idea to the Council Board and staff of Cobb Senior Services, the first *Cobb Senior Idol* event was held in June 2005 at Windy Hill Senior Center.

That first production proved to be so successful that the event was moved the following year to the theatre in order to accommodate the audience. For many seniors, having the show at the Anderson Theatre is their opportunity of a lifetime to perform on a professional stage, complete with lights, music and lots of action.

This year’s contestants included Diane Abdi (piano & vocal), Larry Abel (harmonica), Bianca Ballard & Gailya Stephenson (comedy & vocal), Doris Blanton (vocal), Marty Gardner (song & dance), Mark Kurtz (vocal), Laurenze Rhadans (steel guitar & vocal), Murray Sarkin (vocal), and Peggy Smith (tap).

While performances were limited to seniors who are at least 55 years of age, Larry Abel proved that talent has no age-limits as he is a mere 90 years young.

As for the judges, forget Randy, Paula, and Simon. Local celebrity judges were Gene Philips, president of Miss Cobb County Scholarship Pageant; Ronald Carter, member of the American Theatre Organ Society and house organist at Callanwolde Fine Arts Center; and John Delves, motivational speaker, writer, and humorist.

While the judges determined the top 5 finalists, it was the audience who voted for the **2008 Cobb Senior Idol**. The five finalists, announced by Master of Ceremonies Bill Gleason, were Diane Abdi, Larry Abel, Mark Kurtz, Murray Sarkin, and Marty Gardner.

By an overwhelming vote, Mark Kurtz of Acworth won the coveted title for his rendition of the Frank Sinatra ballad, *All the Way*. 1st Runner up went to Murray Sarkin of East Cobb for his performance of *Cellophane Man* from the musical, *Chicago*; 2nd Runner up was awarded to Larry Abel of Marietta for his ability to make the harmonica sizzle.

Of course, organizing a production of this magnitude could not happen without the assistance of Shelia Perkins, Cobb Senior Services staff liaison to the Council, and her very capable staff Terry McClellan and Colleen Sberna. Many thanks for their tireless efforts as supporters, advocates and friends of Cobb’s senior residents.



Pictured: Mark Kurtz, 2008 Cobb Senior Idol; Murray Sarkin, 1st Runner Up; Larry Abel, 2nd Runner Up